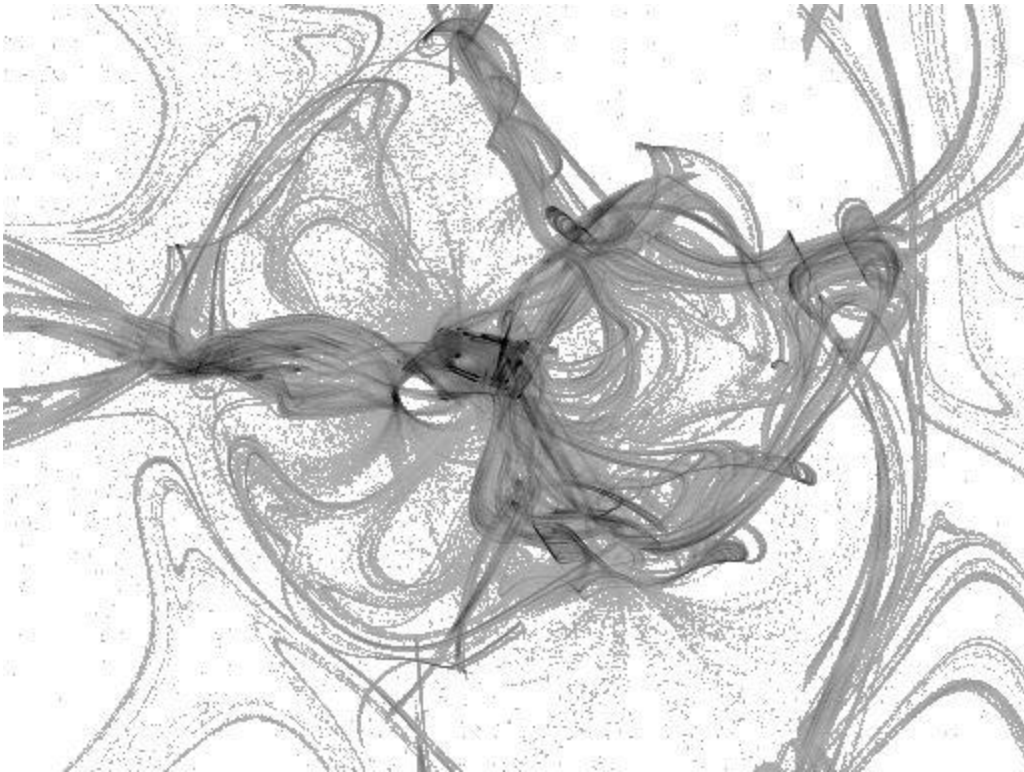


enheduanna in the 21st century

by

eileen r. tabios



xPress(ed)

Enheduanna in the 21st century by Eileen R. Tabios

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For Jade's "Eternal Love"
who once quoted Goethe to note
"Lehren die Musen ihn gleich bescheiden Geheimnisse sprechen"

Introduction

Enheduanna (born ca. 2300 BCE) is considered the world's first recorded poet for seeing her work preserved on cuneiform tablets. A moon princess and daughter of the King of Sumeria, Enheduanna frequently wrote to the Sumerian goddess of love, Innanna (or Ishtar), a deity who then would descend to earth in response to her calls. But, once, Innanna deserted Enheduanna, causing Enheduanna to move to a leper colony to mourn. I wrote this series, "Enheduanna In The 21st Century," to explore the sensibility underlying that period of Enheduanna's anguish: the sensibility of unrequited longing.

The narrative for "Enheduanna In The 21st Century" is located in New York City. The first ten poems are written from a woman's imagined perspective of the man for whom she longs ("YOU"). The second ten poems are from the woman's perspective ("I").

"Enheduanna #20" doubles back onto the first 19 poems to become tercets linking fragments from the earlier poems. Through this technique, I wished metaphorically to create a circle, which is to say, create an archetype whose resonance is timeless. This archetype also may be called *Love*.

--Eileen R. Tabios

"YOU"

ENHEDUANNA #1

And are you thinking of me while you pace the streets of a city whose sidewalks have memorized the atonal rhythm of my footsteps? Surely you have walked through the spaces I have hollowed out from air and left behind in anticipation of you. Through the years I have lightened the forlorn dimness of many alleys by leaving behind single-stemmed red roses -- has your shoulder been tapped by their perfume? Has my scent threaded itself yet through the circles wind-drawn with the ink of your curly hair? Once, we stood unknowingly in the same room of this city with numerous rooms -- have you entered its space again without knowing (until now) why you always look at each face?

There, now. When you turn this corner and feel Baudelaire's "infinite expanse" at the sight of a sky thinned by two parallel skyscrapers, do you think of me latching a star on a gold chain so that its shimmer will lower your eyes to my breasts?

In this city replete with paintings who have witnessed us both fail repeatedly to see each other, are you thinking of me while you and I have yet to know you and I? And when we finally meet, will you see me as familiar? Of course you will. And not just for mirroring the color of each other's eyes. When we finally meet, why will you see me as familiar?

ENHEDUANNA #2

And perhaps you are looking today at a sky whose blue sapphire radiance often makes her sing, and you hear her singing now. Perhaps you pass a man on the street chewing on an unlit cigar, and you grin. Perhaps you see a couple in a café sharing a bottle of the Apollonio Divoto Copertino, Rosso Riserva 1997 whose jammy presence once made you pucker and think of her lips. Perhaps you watch a woman with long, dark hair peek at you and smile as she walks by, hips swaying. Perhaps a mutual acquaintance mentions her name to your secret relish. Perhaps a tourist asks you for directions and he shall look at you with gentle, brown eyes. Perhaps you walk by an alley and pause at the scent of a rose.

Perhaps all of these occur within the frame of a single dream you want to last forever. But you must wake to begin pacing again the streets of a city ruled by absentee gods, causing you and she for years to approximate each other with others. This city where you learned that "the random does not suffice." Where you know she wrote the text for books whose titles encompass *Purity*, *Smoke*, *Thrall*, *Shield*, *Brush*, *Mote*, *Sheen* -- which is to say, *The Encyclopedia of the Om*.

Perhaps this evening the moon shall arrive prematurely because your eyes long for her. Your anticipation shall be so keen that you shall discover the moon before it becomes its mythical image of a pearl, as immortalized on an untold number of paintings. You shall see the virgin moon's form as a ruby that fell from her soft cheek. You shall feel her whisper "Commitment costs" in the tone of an ecstatic whose radiant eyes reveal no remorse.

Perhaps there is an empty chair near where you pause in your wanderings. You shall see its space, the form it etches from space. Perhaps its geometry will be traversed by the gold track of a sunbeam, making you anticipate her poem about a chair whose expanse is the totality of a planet, still unexplored.

ENHEDUANNA #3

And you suddenly become a statue in the midst of a crowded street, a horde of black-clad strangers dividing itself about you (making you remember, even as you continue to fall into this dream, a photograph of nuns lifting their skirts as they run towards the edge of a wave). What makes you pause, forgetting those waiting for you by the front desk of a gallery, waiting for you to tell them what they shall see today? What makes you defer the plea of eyes, longing to feel what you wish for them because you are generous with what "that insurance man" once said about Poetry: giving pleasure?

She wants to answer the question by noting how your hand had lengthened towards a lady entering a car when you thought her long hair hid the face of someone who rarely smiles. But she knows the truth is that you and she woke one day to find yourselves facing each other in a gold-framed mirror. She knows the truth is that, just now in this dream that froze your stance amidst a turbulently moving crowd, you felt her whisper to someone: "I hold a darkness that I would never wish upon those I love. I am sorry. I am so sorry."

As you lower your hand from the gritty wake of a departing car, whose occupant was not she whom you now seek until you can wipe away her tears, your dream ruptures into an earlier dream: you are on a bed reading a story you helped birth. You are raising your eyes from a page to whisper to a candlelight that flickers as it dodges the wind gushing from an open window: "How will I survive the forthcoming revelations as regards your unspeakable fragility?" You hear a pearl split to become known as a half-moon.

Somewhere, a teacher ends a class by lowering herself on a mat. Before a crowd of acolytes, she bends forward and over her crossed legs, her right hand clasping her left wrist behind her back. She forms the yogic seal in gratitude to all as everything is existence. She forms the mudra as she offers, "Bless yourself, bless all beings, bless yourself again." Behind closed eyes, she sees a white light. After wiping her tears away, you will bury your face in her hair and smell a rose immortalized at the peak of blooming. After bathing in warm, white light, she opens her eyes to rise.

ENHEDUANNA #4

And today it seems that every portrait of a woman is looking at you (and its original painter) sideways. ("It is so difficult to master the gaze.") This does not surprise you. What you do not expect is how, today, every woman you see within a frame reveals limbs and the shadows of limbs behind semi-transparent gowns. Once, you saw a ziggurat tattooed on a thigh -- a memory whose future will be uncertain as to whether it was formed today or by a long-haired lady raising a wand in a dream. You pause the longest before a canvas so old that its subject seems shrouded by a night sky. Its peeling flecks evoke the white stars waltzing in languid circles to form the ever-shifting Milky Way. But the lady's peeking eyes survive the years and they glimmer at you, though whether the sheen is one of mischief or dammed tears remains the subjectivity of someone not identified.

Nor did you anticipate how every portrait you see today is outlined by cracked frames. A particularly deep gash on silver-gilded wood reminds you of the jasmine scent that surfaced from air when you heard her whisper, "Break the form because there is something much, much larger at stake. Perhaps imagination, perhaps the knowing that one is alive."

You realize you are living this moment within the embrace of a city as familiar to her as it is to you. You realize that, until this moment, you and she have embraced many and yet never felt each other's non-analytic geometry. You realize that without Poetry the definition of "intimacy" would be inaccurate by relying only on what is known. You turn and are halted by the startled face of a girl with green eyes. She wears "holey" jeans and hair dyed cobalt, and you feel your lips sculpt a gentle smile.

ENHEDUANNA #5

And you know she is longing for you. You can taste that same *want*-ing within the fragile crystal cradled between your fingers. Dr. Loosen '99 Wehlener Sonnenhur Riesling Beerenauslese: "a bouquet of slate and roses, a molten flavor of starfruit, honey and pineapples." The nectar thickens your tongue as you feel drenched in the cool afternoon, sitting in a sidewalk café. She believes "Poetry must burn" and the street before you has taken on the tinge of a fire...or a rose.

You look at the wine you ordered because she wrote about it. Once, she asked: "I can only access the world through words. Is this a flaw?" You replied by offering, "I would like to listen."

You are the same man, she discovers after she has begun to tell you everything, who was not surprised to learn that Frank Andre Jamme began to collect Tantric paintings because their fragile forms elicited the poetry of Octavio Paz and Henri Michaux.

What you did not expect is a fragility that can be articulated through her recognition: she is seduced by hungers that are impossible to satiate. You are unsure about taking on such "ravishment." But perhaps you are beginning to wonder, too, whether it's time to lapse back into words. Once, a universe birthed itself through the *Word*. You raise the thin crystal bearing liquid gold. As your lips touch the glass rim, your eyes look up and you see: a cloud forming an angel's wing, a necklace of small moons on a woman pausing before a ruby street light, a white feather falling from the breast of a dove cooing on a windowsill, a man revealing a pristine white cuff as he raises his wrist to check a Movado steel watch, a page turning on the notebook of a haggard poet at the next table writing a poem, writing a poem, writing a poem...

ENHEDUANNA #6

And you look around the room more intently than you otherwise might because you wonder if she is part of the audience. You guess correctly that she would attend one of your speaking engagements were she in the same city bearing your presence. You guess correctly that she would not reveal herself to you. You guess all this correctly but also know that, despite her many masks, she cannot hide the colors that adorn her: cobalt, green jade, milky pearl, blood ruby, steel gray and at least one other she has not yet identified.

Once more, you look for a startled girl with hair the color of "sky and water." But such a result would be too easy and you know: her Poetry elicits dragon scales from her empathetic muscles. For a moment, you consider a woman with a feathered hat holding court in the center of the aisle, but forego her scarf that contains the colors you seek because "the poem never raises its voice." You pause at the sight of a rose, but your eyes move on when you realize the "rose" is pinned to a lapel, thus symbolizing the thing instead of being the thing itself. You wish to continue searching but an affable man signals: it is time for your program to begin.

Afterwards, friends admire your coolness in the face of the occasional hostile remark. You are so "cool" that you were unfazed, reducing the tension to a "mere disagreement." Or perhaps you also were distracted by your continued inspection of surfaces sharing the interior of a school teaching what cannot be taught (some things simply require acceptance without "necessary knowing"?). Once, she wrote about a room where you unknowingly stood by her side. Back then, as now, you are still unfamiliar with her perfume.

It is not until you are strolling beneath a city sky suddenly sparkling with the Milky Way's white lights that you realize she (surrendered to desire and) approached, then touched, you. A handshake that made you feel the press of diamonds. Where each facet bore a playground for rainbows: prisms containing all colors. Whose image you did not see within the closed embrace of your palm. You struggle now to remember the face above the hand whose brief warmth you remember relishing. But you recall only the blur of a cheek shyly turning away, hair covering eyes, and a murmured whisper: "Unlike some of the others, I agree..."

ENHEDUANNA #7

And as you hear “the tango provide the perfect background music for bewildering failures,” you long once more to face a long-haired woman across the table, dusk in her eyes. You would offer fare never tasted by those who don taffeta ballgowns to spend evenings battling loneliness: “spicy chorizo sausages, crisp-skinned morcillas (blood sausage studded with raisins), crusty sweetbreads and amazingly tender kidneys.” You know she would bare her teeth fearlessly, then later nod robustly at another suggestion: “a puckery lemon sorbet to end?” Nor would you be surprised if she still would plead for a postscript of chocolates.

All this jumps ahead of the story’s linear unfolding. Within your longing for what may transpire after a feast that leaves you both still ravenous, you have not yet mentioned what you now report as a dream to share with the one you hope will read this tale: a decanter of dark, red-purple wine she placed on the table. She pours her offering for you in the same gesture women have made for centuries for those they wish to please, a gesture you also longed from her after you saw it immortalized as oil on canvas. As the liquid slides into your glass you smell ripe plums. The wine caresses your tongue with a languor you hope your touch shall effect someday on her limbs. The taste lingers with a tart-sweet cherry finish, resonating as much as the poems she writes helplessly for you.

Such is the power of the tango being carved against air by a silver-haired woman sheathed in black velvet. You turn from the dancer to see that an invisible guitar’s haunting notes also have brought her now to you. She leans towards you to fill your vision. She leans across damask, crystal, silver, porcelain, a candle’s flame, and a low bowl replete with vermilion roses. Tonight you had decided to dine alone within mahogany-paneled walls to summon forth her company. “Faith = Hope.” Her lips curve before they whisper: “Tasting notes for a wine I have never sipped are effortless within the universe bearing the gold label of *POEM*.” You respond by placing a palm over the pulse dancing uncontrollably on the wrist she has exposed before you. And she obviates “bewilderment” (defined as four decades of failing to achieve intimacy with her perfume) when she admits: “My greatest lover shall be the Poet whose sense of humor convinced humanity into believing the siren song is sung by others outside of one’s mind.”

ENHEDUANNA #8

And you pause before joining the line of assorted strangers waiting to leave New York City. Airport terminals, you suddenly realize, contain too much steel. A little girl with wide, solemn eyes peeks at you from behind her mother's linen skirt dyed with what you inexplicably recognize as the interior of a sweet Philippine mango. You hear a childish voice proclaim with an "utmost confidence" since diminished by adulthood: "I made a book!" You join the line of travelers handing tickets to a flight attendant whose severe uniform offers the color of "impenetrable blue," like the depths of an ocean transformed into a void when the sun departed after witnessing her dive. You've long understood that color is a narrative, so that you look now through the large window hoping for a double rainbow.

You anticipate that she shall sing to you someday of a double rainbow that greeted her one morning as she looked over the "shivering world" from a mountain in St. Helena (CA). Rows of vines defined winter's "repose" through fallen leaves that revealed the color "silver" through steel wires wrapped around grape stalks. While a raven overhead spread glossy wings stained the sadly-familiar color of blue during the sun's absence, she admired the twin rainbows shimmering beyond the perimeter of her coffee-filled cup. Steam clouded the image of a rose painted against thin Irish porcelain. Through the warm smoke, her eyes traced the double arcs into a neighbor's pond inset into earth like a bead of turquoise.

Before you rose from a black leather chair to fall in line you had been reading about *Life and a House in Southern Tuscany*. You were learning a fabric existed named "Solace" and how it was available in celery, parchment, black pearl, creme brulee, persimmon, and blue sage. You know with "utmost confidence" she would love the vocabulary of fabrics: how "reds were tomato or claret, greens were khaki or *caca d'oie* (quite literally 'goose shit,' and resembling tarnished copper), oranges were brick, terra cotta, or cinnamon."*

What does it say about her that she shall never seek to unearth the twin cauldrons of gold coins whose secret locations have been revealed by nothing less than light? As your feet leave New York City to step into a plane, you feel her waiting for you to promise: "One day, you and I shall share the same time zone as we reclaim this volatile city to teach what it finds so difficult to comprehend: *Compassion*."

ENHEDUANNA #9

And you are greeted by a lady smiling as she directs you down the aisle. You look at the curves of her lips and wonder about another who has infiltrated your thoughts all week. You wonder why you care that a woman you have never met has come to shield herself with an impassive face. You wonder how you have come to know what few others understand: she hides a "cache / of milk- / fed laughter" that, released, would refresh your memory as to how you once wrote during a lost decade: "the world widens / as it flows."

It takes time for the crowd to find and settle into their seats. As you intermittently take a step or two, you remember the same slow pace walking through a group of businessmen in tan trench coats on Sixth Avenue. You finally paused in their midst to see what had made them gather around a tobacconist's window. You saw an old man rolling brown cigars on a small table. His eyes twinkled, as she has said yours can and as you hope twinkled at her during days as a child playing within her grandfather's tobacco farm. You read the signs surrounding the man on the other side of glass: "Macamundo, Push, Hoyo de Monterrey, Cohiba, Partagas, Excalibur, Davidoff, Zino." While you and she appreciate litanies like this for dancing with tongues, you know you were seeing a compromised version of the image you would rather peruse: someone's hands rolling cigars against her thighs bared like the mythologized Cuban virgin's.

You consider the image invading the landscape of your mind as you lower yourself onto your assigned seat. You transform "someone's hands" into the hands you see buckling your safety belt. Undoubtedly, you would smoke the cigar but only after a glass of "black label, Gerard Quiy": year unknown but "magnificent and sublime with the fruit, chocolate, tobacco and charm" of Gevrey-Chambertin terroir. But, first, you would do something else involving your hands and the thighs she revealed by raising a voluminous skirt embroidered with ribbons shimmering like sunlit rivers.

Of course the ribbons bring "the external world into the private world of a poet's imagination" by representing all existing colors, whether as natural as the white snow dusting adobes in New Mexico or as artificial as the white ash dribbling persistently on neighborhoods surrounding *Ground Zero*. Always, as you now know, she must contain *all* narratives distilled through color. The poet privileges nothing or everything. "Authenticity" in a Poem is nothing or everything.

ENHEDUANNA #10

And you find it difficult to leave New York City. You chased her as a ghost peeking around street corners, lurking within the brow of a sunlit sky, ducking behind other women who wear her colors as expensive reproductions packaged by faux scientists in white coats, and dined with her in a private club whose mahogany-paneled location also now slips away from your memory. It is difficult to leave the island which failed to be small enough for your fingers to limn through hers as she shyly turns away from your burning gaze. As you see the air beyond your round window shimmer from the roar of the airplane's engine, you feel a blurred face toss a wave of hair to fall as a drape over a fragile eye.

"All that is left today of the church in this riverbank hamlet are four bullet-scarred walls. The roof was blown off. The wooden pews are splintered, the statue of Jesus smashed to pieces. The floor is covered with blood and maggots, evidence of the worst loss of civilian life in a single day in Colombia's seemingly endless civil conflict." And you frown as you anticipate that this latest news from Bellavista, Colombia will cause her eyes to leak diamonds that will etch her cheeks before dropping as rubies onto a cold hotel floor.

You have learned enough to realize her fingers falter now as she writes this last poem from your perspective because ten is the Buddhist number for perfection. You have learned enough to know she prefers writing *Beauty*, like how Bianca Jaigler uses a soaring lady's slipper orchid to sculpt the image of an alighted butterfly. "Like a bouquet of Phalaenopsis orchids and Renown Unique tulips in a vase wrapped in stems of Cornus flaviraea green (yellow-stem dogwood)" staring at her now from a magazine as she writes your presence. As, once more, she *helplessly* writes your presence.

But it is her time to leave your mind, and write from hers. From her midtown hotel, she already feels the loss of a skyline robbed of "twin towers, shimmering silver, perfectly symbolizing the limitless aspiration and promise of New York City." She reads the same newspaper you are reading and empathizes with those "hunger(ing) for an anchor in the clouds." To be a poet is to be in the moment so that one chooses well how to absent one's self from the work. She feels she chose well by succumbing to your "I" through ten poems. Now she must release you to gather in the pain she expects to find in this city, to spare you from an anguish she recognizes she must hold as her own.

You understand all of this for you are a man with a steel spine. But you have learned enough so that you are moved to whisper as you look down over a city of skyscrapers piercing the clouds, "In England there are glazed chintzes with sprays of rose, peony, hydrangea and gladiola whose names evoke the life of country houses: Bowood, Amberley, Sissinghurst, Sutherland. There are linens called Lamorna or Serge Antique which come not in white and gray but toast and oyster. There is a tapestry fabric called Marly, from whose complex greenery small red berries occasionally burst. In London there is a room from where I shall always read and write you. My Love, oh my dear Love, you never imagined my longing, my missing you."

"I"

ENHEDUANNA #11

And I know I am missing you when I start seeing mules where Susan Rothenberg painted deers. Absence as presence is "so cruel," she thinks. Like the "black holes" a painter described over last night's dinner. He said he was interested in the curvature of the fall as all existence is swallowed by the void. I replied by affirming my commitment to the Blue Event Horizon where what succumbs to gravity remains suspended. "The fall never completes itself," all the selves defining my "I" posited earnestly. I consider the red air floating over the upper left corner of Rothenberg's "White Deer." I decide the color symbolizes melted "jewels and binoculars." A banker who became a poet happily turned diamonds into toy marbles. She welcomed the reward of lucidity. But she did not expect heightened vision to contain the capacity for liquefying stones. "Still, the result as color encompasses sky and water," a stranger whispers. And as your breath becomes a breeze caressing my hair, I fall into the cobalt sky smiling this morning over New York City.

ENHEDUANNA #12

And I am pleasantly surprised by three gold banners waving over Park Avenue. They coat sections of the cobalt sky and, oh!, I long to share this natural painting with you! For the point is not what's trapped inside a frame hanging on a nail that penetrates a wall. Surely the point, my Love, is to "live the splendor now!"

Which is why I lower my gaze deliberately. Which is why I expose myself to the tension of traffic: its blaring horns, its jaywalkers, its illegal hawkers raising plastic handbags, its bicyclist grazing a shrieking matron, its truck driver raising a middle finger at a cab driver stuttering "Unbelievable! Un-be-liev-a-ble!" But beyond this jostling crowd is a glass door I shall open to a silver organza bag tied with a satin ribbon featuring "rosette enhancement." Nestled within its tulle netting shall be Lindor truffles in "all available flavors: milk, dark, white, amaretto, hazelnut, peanut butter, and mint."

Engulfed now by a crowd of faces who do not see me, I would settle cheerfully for the sight of curly hair disappearing behind a skyscraper's revolving door so that I might pause for the refreshment of wondering: did my eyes, though briefly, perceive you as something beyond words crowding my imagination? Did we share, though briefly, the same space where we would have heard rather than seen each other's words? The same space where, had we startled each other with our eyes, our bodies would have gravitated to each other along the shortest path possible between two points? And then...?

Would such an illusion feed me splendor someday by surfacing in a poem? But that is for another moment and, now, I shall settle for choosing a frowning stranger to address, such as this one approaching in a wrinkled business suit and stained, flopping tie. I shall point at the gilded sky and tell him what I also long to tell you: "Doesn't this image make you glad you are alive!"

ENHEDUANNA #13

And because I see today how the sky waxes and wanes between white and grey, I know you have become uncertain. How difficult is it to remain impassive before the sight of tremor? You are learning how a secret contains seemingly infinite depth, so that what she avows most frankly never captures the totality of a story. For instance, she may cling to you because you are like the sky: a body impossible to hold, thus, a body unable to hold her.

She stumbles across an artist who professes: "When I leave a shape transparent rather than painting it in, it gets to have a more open-ended and ambiguous relationship to the whole. For me it's sort of existing outside of conscious, linear time and space." While her approach enervates what she calls the "necessarily static and still medium of painting," something else first happened. Something attracts her to the idea of feeling the invisible.

Something else first happened. I attempt optimism by recalling another artist who stilled her pencil long enough to say: "By stripping the represented object of color, graphite drawing has the advantage of directing the viewer's attention toward that which is intrinsic to the object itself....I do all this in hope that the viewer may experience the feeling (however fleeting and illusory) of being confronted with the essence of an object, with that which makes the object what it is independently of how and by whom it is perceived."

I attempt optimism by never forgetting: when the sky becomes blue, it becomes as physical as an organ. Encompassing the hollow beneath your neck where I love to bury my face. Softening your eyes. Allowing the span of your embrace. While I recall an eighty-two-year-old artist soothing me after she placed a slice of the Mediterranean atop my desk: "The reward is the making. Color is getting more complex and harder to mix. There are more complexities in it because my own experience is much more complex." I steel my spine long enough to offer my lips to your ear. By whose door I whisper, "There are more secrets aching to be revealed: colors longing to be seen after a process without shortcuts."

I see the jade line of the horizon as my armless hands continue to play the piano, where fingers tend to move towards the highest scale immortalized in pale ivory. There is a reason today why our eyes know each other's faces as abstract. There is a poem awaiting my tears of white salamanders. There is a reason why you brood over realizing the sky is an image. There is a reason for certain secrets and why they should not exist. There is a reason why a poem lacks a body but already bears a title: *Eternal Love*.

ENHEDUANNA #14

And I wake from a dream of white heat: sun-washed walls forming a room where silk sculpted a milk puddle against a terra cotta floor. Island. Greece. Slow-shifting shadows. Behind a lapis lazuli sky, Athena battled Venus for my loyalty (as if I ever would lapse to the binary). My fingers were reaching for the lace strap of a translucent softness that dared to come between us the night before, before your hands clenched then ripped. I heard your voice as I woke into a hotel room in the other side of the world from sunlit languor: a space dimmed by the palette of clouds. As I woke, you were stilling my hand and telling me, your breath caressing my cheek, "No need to cover yourself. I want to see all of you beneath this morning sun, this pure white light."

We have never shared a morning sun, though our words have shared many mornings. Is it overcast again where you sit looking through a computerized doorway, past its sheer curtain of words with open-ended definitions? Perhaps a light rain drizzles like wine against a windowpane and you remember "legs" as a synonym for its thickened tracks? Come closer with your listening eyes, Stranger I Address As Dear. (And when I call you "Dear" are we both surprised by the lack of surprise accompanying this fate?) You mirrored my eyes when, once, you said: A poet rarely says "No," especially to the unknown.

Should we pause this expressionist brushstroke so I may ask: What can I do to break a certain pattern? What can I do to avoid the birth of regret in this space you and I have fashioned from moon, light, wind, sky, mules, paintings, rainbows, diamonds, chocolates, "aggressive speculation," and the wings of six fallen angels? What can I do now that we shall never be strangers? You and I who know I even have trafficked with cruel men. You and I who know you prefer to brood (though I know not what the preference is against. Perhaps contentment? Is a poet ever content?). Look over there at yet another image I am brewing for you: do you see the mahogany side table gleaming with the sheen of sunlit sapphires? One of its four legs has rebelled. The wooden claw has released the ball it clutched for centuries. The claw has stretched its fingers to feel velvet on a rug woven by long-dead boys when only a thin cloth protected their limbs from a scorching sun. This rug of Joseph's "many colors" where, someday, you gladly shall fall for another poem I shall lick against your skin. Within its text shall be the occasional word necessarily bitten into the most tender parts of your flesh. A poem that sears even as you shall gasp: "More...! Never...ever...stop...!"

ENHEDUANNA #15

And because our wine glasses drip with viscous glycerin tracks that make my companions roar "Nice legs!" I imagine you have joined this crowd at our table now being serenaded by a red-nosed owner as he howls from "La Traviata." We are cutting steaks amidst decanters of wine brooding as much as you like to furrow your brow (as when you realized "the sky is an image!"). Tonight, surrounded by ancient teak walls that once formed an explorer's ship, I am the only woman amidst a group of oenophiles. This only makes me miss you more: I have too many metaphorical brothers: I want you as my literal lover.

Am I being too forward, like an over-oaked Chilean? Chalk it up to two wines before I stopped keeping track (after my eyes strayed to a waiter with your penetrating eyes and curly locks):

1995 Le Bahans du Chateau Haut Brion: Fragrant, elegant bouquet of classic Haut Brion. Gravel, currants, tad of leather, cigar, earth. Jammy. Great balance between fruit and acid. Concentrated sweet tannins. Black fruit. Good oak. Lingering rich finish of fruit. Tobacco base.

1999 Chateau de Beaucastel CNP: Big, red fruits. Plums and cherries. Voluptuous. Spice. Velvet. Well-knit. Sweet tannins. Excerpts of a conversation: "Underrated." "So full-bodied you just want to fondle it." "With your tongue?" "Hands okay." "Bold and daring."

Oh, how I hide behind words! Surely your lucid eyes are not distracted from my unruly tongue's slip! (Yes, my Love, I want you literally, not only literarily.) Today I salvaged a dusty book from the depths of a bookstall bin, Frances Wilson's *Literary Seductions*, because of its title and homage to a certain Ada: "Love set you going like / a fat gold watch" (a dedication whose merriment reminded me of the cheer in your personality). The book recalls Anais Nin and Henry Miller, Laura Riding and Robert Cross, Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam, W.B. and George Yeats. Their stories are of people living and loving through words.

I write now to conjure this conclusion: their stories will not be ours. I choose a different version of authenticity as demanded by (my) Poetry. I choose the specific idea of seducing you, not the general charm of seduction. I choose Love (with a capitalized "L"), not Love's textual colophons. Amidst dark-suited men flinging silk ties behind shoulders, my knife slices meat again and again. I am not surprised to observe: I relish the occasional seep of blood. As I chew and swallow, I am infiltrated by the future memory of animals roasting on fires ablaze beneath a night sky, where flames leap toward the stars, where the shadows beneath my eyes turn lavender, where even the air is primitive as hunters' rifles lean against fallen logs.

I long now for the praxis of our mouths relishing each other's skin in the same time zone, your hand tipping a goblet of melted rubies before lips you have just thoroughly kissed. (Once, then again, you bit. Then again...) I shall swallow earth, leather, currants, gravel, tobacco, oak, plums to release the same voluptuous tears familiar to Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, two writers who loved through 573 letters but knew better than to leave the story there. They eloped to Italy. They bore a son they nicknamed with much affection: "Pen."

ENHEDUANNA #16

And because the sea remains in the wet sheen of pink salmon strips collaged in a loose grid before me, I remember your awe over water, how water offers an "inner animation, this radiation of the visible" that painters seek "beneath the words depth, space and colour." Suddenly, light shifts and Barney Greengrass (Upper West Side, New York City), is awash with Merleau-Ponty's "syrupy and shimmering element"! Everything -- diners, waiters, walls, a coat stand buried by blue down jackets, a seeing-eye dog, baskets of bagels, a plump-cheeked baby grinning a drool-wet tooth, my companion who is not you -- disappears until the only image visible is the white gloss of ceramic serving platters overlaid by glistening gravlax, Nova Scotia salmon, rainbow trout, lox, Portuguese sardines, sturgeon and Beluga caviar.

This morning, light flickers as if each individual lash lowered over my eyes draws vertical lines across my vision. The idea, birthed by the anxiety of "unrequited longing," evokes a curtain of rain that once fell between myself and the German landscape of Vilseck. Beneath an open tent, surrounded by huge farmers in huge overalls with huge accents, huge bellies, huge biceps, and huge red cheeks, I was attempting to finish just one stein of beer, but finding it difficult as the beer mug was ... huge. For the entirety of a wet afternoon, I was assaulted by huge platters gleaming with huge, overstuffed sausages. For an entire afternoon of rain, my eyes sought consolation in the orange-gold, foam-topped liquid in my glass, the same radioactive color of lighting bolts I have never witnessed over Kauai.

Once, in rain-soaked Kauai, the lushest spot on earth, I was lifted by a helicopter up the side of a mountain overlooking Waimea Canyon. The pilot, a Vietnam Vet whose sly humor also reminds me of you, refused to warn me of the steep, 90-degree drop on the other side of the peak. Instead, as soon as we reached the top, hovering for three seconds as I inhaled in the verdant view, he pulled (or was it pushed?) a lever and our copter simply plummeted in a straight line. What he didn't know as he grinned at me was how I welcomed his manifestation of one of the many things I "should know to be a poet": the "edge of death." We fell down in a straight line like the thin waterfall etched like a furrow against a cliff to parallel our plunge. The same straight line I shall trace one day with a nerve-wracked but determined finger beginning its caress from the furrow deepening on your brow, before moving on down, down, down...

ENHEDUANNA #17

(--after #1)

And, helpless against this urge to think of you, I am thinking of you while I pace the streets of a city whose sidewalks have memorized the atonal rhythm of my footsteps. I walk through spaces I hollowed out from air and left behind in anticipation of you. Through the years I lit the forlorn dimness of many alleys by leaving behind single-stemmed scarlet roses -- I walk slowly now past these passageways once too familiar to me, wondering if my legacy's perfume tapped your shoulders, whether their fragrance threaded through the circles wind-drawn with the ink of your curly hair.

Once, we stood unknowingly in the same room of this city with numerous rooms -- as I continue to walk I realize I am headed now towards this one room. Today I anticipate many of its black-clad occupants will peruse portraits over the edges of goblets filled with wine. Though the figure is of the exhibiting female Chinese artist, the viewers will look for themselves in the archetypes of the gaze: the peek through long lashes, the sighting behind one's shoulder, the wide-open eyes staring full-frontally, the lids lowered half-way to seduce and/or to hide, the eye shut in a mischievous wink. I will enter this room again, knowing why I will look at each face on the bodies there, splitting from and joining with other groups of circulating bodies in one languorous dance of amoebas.

There, now. I turn this corner and feel Baudelaire's "infinite expanse" at the sight of a sky thinned by two parallel skyscrapers. Oh, did you think of me latching a star on a gold chain so that its shimmer will lower your eyes to my breasts? Did you think of me? (Did you think of "ogling" me?) Did you ache to penetrate my eyes directly for the first time? Did you long for me?

In this city replete with paintings who have witnessed us both fail repeatedly to see each other, I am thinking of you, though you and I have yet to know you and I. And when we finally meet, will I see you as familiar? Of course I will. And not just for mirroring the color of each other's eyes. When we finally meet, I will see you as familiar for ascribing beauty to a "sense of dislocation." Which is only one reason, neither the first or last, as to why I long to feel your eyes beyond the words you send as we know you deliberately limit your articulations. You want me, you see. While I? I have tired of the hide, hiding...

ENHEDUANNA #18

And sunlight generously spills through wide windows, their bars casting inexplicably familiar shadows of thin crosses against the repeated, rotating rhomboids bordered by eight-pointed stars on the 19th century Shahsavan carpeting a granite floor. Though I am not drinking tea this late part of a radiant afternoon as I listen to another poet, I am bludgeoned for the first time by how I have never seen you offer me a cup, a glass, a mug. Which is to say, I have never seen your hand penetrate smoke to enter my space. Where I wait for you as Isis peels through centuries longing for Osiris to return. I have never watched the pale skin throb over your blue-veined pulse. I have never counted your heartbeats naked against my palm. I have never felt your breath skim my cheek. I have never parted my lips as, your hands on my waist, you moved closer to obviate air between our flesh.

I watch this beloved poet as he speaks narratives that are not pointless but not the point. The point is companionship and I wonder whether you and I will ever meet like this, ease adding another lustrous dimension to luminous light. Will we ever meet in a high-ceilinged room made cozy with just the right amount (for once!) of chintz? As teal subtly dominates the décor of this space I share with another and makes palatable the cabbage roses encasing arm chairs, I wonder about the palette of the place where you write and listen to my random leaps at fantasy. Such as how, someday, you will pause to stand before the marble steps of a museum, look up at a sky of blue sapphire, and feel fists form within the pockets of your overcoat because of a sudden bludgeoning by the emptiness instead of my hair within your holding hands. Such as how, someday, you will be the one to write a poem. That you will write a poem for the specificity of me who belongs as you do within the totality of the world.

Such as how, someday, you will be conversing as easily with a sculptor as I chat comfortably now with this poet in a teal-painted room (the grace of mathematics spilling out beneath our feet), and see how the sculptor “absently rearrange[s] objects on a table -- ashtray, boxes, pencils -- [to] alter their relationships in space.” You will see how “form-perception fill[s] the constant breathing moments of his dedicated life” and you will conclude, no matter how many poets have labored, are laboring, will labor, there are never enough poems. Never enough poems. And as you read me now, you feel me sitting before a small desk, buried in a man’s plaid bathrobe, unkempt hair falling over bloodshot eyes, ink smudging all fingers, munching on “a cookie chock full of mountainous chunks of rich milk chocolate and munchable macadamia nuts,” as I write, as I write, as I write: Never enough.

ENHEDUANNA #19

And, wonderfully though incongruously, I hear country music lift its gingham skirt to blare blowzy notes through a Chelsea street. A woman lingers over a wound as she wails out the song wafting now through an art gallery's open window: "I fall to pieces / each time someone speaks your name / I fall to pieces / time only adds to the flame...." As I share my companions' knowing laughter, I feel myself becoming enamored with the blonde. She stands with left hip cocked insouciantly over legs encased in false (and purple!) snakeskin. I know I become infatuated because, despite dyed hair, she achieved something I desire: touched you (with pink-tipped fingers) and seen you (with emerald eyes).

If, as I have dreamt, I possess twenty-ten vision, I then can see wind shift along an ocean's silver surface. Or the curl of a leaf dropping a few miles away. Or pencil-thin smoke rising behind two mountains. I can spot a "hole" defined by sailors as "no wind." Like Chuck Yeager, whose flight broke the sound barrier, who sighted enemy fighter planes in pre-radar days before they could see him. Or Ted Williams who discerned the rotation of a pitched ball. To possess such a vision allows me to see the "spin of the sun." But I would sacrifice so easily this "close reading" ability for astigmatic near-sightedness if the latter gave me the same experience I envy from this lady streaked blonde.

For several days now while visiting New York City, strangers have stopped me on sun-dazzled streets to remark: my eyes contain "the ancient mystical look possessed by ocean sailors and bush pilots" who continuously see beyond the horizon while tracking the fate of winds. "No one else," New Yorkers proclaimed to me all week, robustly nodding over their own wisdom, "has to think about winds as much as pilots and sailors!"

I fail to wonder: since when have New Yorkers become expert on sailors and pilots? Or the wind? Instead, I consider how the "mystical look" in my eyes must originate from my doomed attempts to pierce the barrier into a parallel universe where you and I need not imagine each other. Where you and I need not be locked in the aftermaths of our departures from a city we once shared for decades, even as our meanderings intersected just once (just once!) and that such intersection occurred without our knowledge. Just once, in a room where only paintings witnessed our "bewildering" blindness at how we both tilt our faces when we see something that fascinates.

She writes these "dreamt whispers" on the 572nd anniversary of Joan of Arc's capture by Burgundians who sold her to the English. As she has told you in a different poem, Joan of Arc is one of her prior selves, one reason she defines "Home" as "Heat." The significance of this anniversary may be in St. John of the Cross' arrival in her life today so that he can remind: "The greatest conquest ever won / I won in blindness, like the night."

Tell me, you who reads me: are you as unmoved as your reticence implies? Unmoved as you witness me "lose myself from [my] view" of you? *Of you.* Of course, I know you tilt your face when you read me (but what does it take for you to acknowledge my effect thrilling your veins since, as we both know, speaking the *Word* is speaking *Identity*?). I forgot to tell you through 18 poems: a fireplace mantel from a 12th century Loire Valley chateaux props up a wall in the room where, once, our paths crossed; over it hangs a mirror "left outdoors one winter to weather to an appropriate cloudiness." And here is yet another conjuration: I will never say, "I have loved you," as so many pale characters declaim in stories attempting to be Russian novels. We will never live through the past tense. Somewhere, a child awaits birth in order to translate me. The child shall begin by identifying me as "The Rose Birthed Without Thorns," synonymous with "The One Forever Embraced By Your Sight." *Forever.*

ENHEDUANNA #20

Vivo sin vivir en mi
"I live without inhabiting myself"
--St. John of the Cross

Momentary
weakness. I fall
asleep
in your
skin. Forget memory.
Please
blow on my dice
--Barry Schwabsky

As you fall asleep
in my skin
will you dream?

Will you want
you or want
to change?

As you fall asleep
in my skin
how will I forget

and remember
you wanting
you in my skin?

Will you bring the scent
of red roses
I left behind

in New York City alleyways
(or has that season yet to pass)?
In my eyes

will you see
Baudelaire's infinity
he defined as the "sky"

you witness repeatedly
on and in any painting
marked by blue sapphire, lapis

lazuli, indigo, turquoise...sky...?
Will you fall into me
on a chair whose expanse

is a newly-birthe'd planet's?
Whose territory we shall explore
with you in my skin?

Will you articulate back
to me to teach me
the vocabulary I lose as I speak it?

Text with surfaces burnished
to shimmer
like certain substances you admire:

a beaded curtain, wet tile,
sea glass scattered on a wooden floor,
enamel on aluminum paintings?

Text whose materiality
gleams forth "Beauty"
as abstraction

while remaining palpably
fraught with meaning--
words like *Purity, Smoke, Thrall,*

Shield, Brush, Mote, Sheen...
"which is to say,"
letters that both signify

and are signified
to comprise *The Encyclopedia*
of the Om?

As you move into and in
my skin, will you remember
the ruby of a virgin moon

I once invoked
while you envied the pieces
of chocolate melting against my tongue?

And the milk complexion
of this same orb
as the moon ascends away from virginity?

And even as you shift
helplessly within me
will you only want to plunge deeper

into my skin you long now
to spread on a beach
crimsoned from leaves loosened by flame trees?

Where you then can taste
on my skin

the color of "sky and water"?

As you fall asleep
in my skin
will you dream of nuns

lifting black skirts
as they tease
the edge of a swiftly-traveling wave?

Will you pause in my skin
to look into my eyes
relishing there the plea you see

transform itself into
the eerie yellow light
photographed within the emerald

eyes of a sadhu
and know you are witnessing
Ecstasy -- its path, fulfillment

and fulfillment into yet another path...?
Will you recall my memory
of the sadhu's naked figure

melding with the tanned face
of a sandstone cliff
as you watch and relish

my skin performing
what you are thinking
that I am thinking

until you begin to hear
a long-haired yogi breathe
over a class of bowed acolytes,

"Bless yourself, bless all beings,
bless yourself again"?
As you fall into my skin

will you see the white light
bathing the yogi's inner eye,
the same radiance I described

to you
while still courting
you to fall asleep

in my skin?
As I keep opening up
to your dream

will you hear all
of the portraits ever painted
by a man's gaze

of women immortalized
amidst (coiled with) desire
shift within their frames

as if they also feel you
falling asleep in their skin?
As if they wish to break

apart their gilded constraints?
Will my hands part
silk, then thighs,

to reveal a ziggurat, "Y*O*U,"
a tear, a dragonfly, a stag?
Once, as your sweat

becomes balm
for my lips
parched by the exertions

you compel from this flesh
containing your
wakeful sleep,

will you recall stumbling
across a girl's startled face
in a museum (infamous for a cheeky

ghost wandering through hallways
in search of a painting
written about but never made)

and feel *my* presence
though I was not that girl?
"If you recall," she wore

"holey" jeans and cobalt hair
that cast your mouth
into a gentle smile.

I have memorized this girl's tale
for its location in a city
you once shared with me

in the same time zone,
a period both our memories failed
to grasp so that I may write

this Poem
whose reality is the Ideal

for you in me

as you fall
into a sleep whose embrace
you desire to defer

as you fear how slumber may cause
you to forget you in my skin.
All this and still -- oh still! --

I keep opening up
to you, to you falling asleep
in my skin!

And now you begin to taste
each undulation of my body
as "a molten mix of starfruit,

honey and pineapples"
while the air, too, begins
to become physical

by taking on the tinge
of fire, rose, ruby,
sunset, dawn, sunset ...

Perhaps you wish to pause again
briefly
to tease yourself along my damp nape

as I only want you
to keep falling, falling
asleep in my skin

though you cannot attain
such sleep. As you remain thrashing
in this place called "sweet insomnia"

(where I up poker stakes
against Artaud, Rimbaud, Baudelaire
and countless others making up "Anonymous")

my hair and its perfume
of musk your sweat
places there

also evoke in you in my skin
the first time I approached you
as "the blur of a cheek

shyly turning away,
hair covering eyes
and a murmured whisper."

What I whispered
was not pointless
but not the point

which is your desire
to fall asleep in my skin
and feel my tongue

share the taste of all colors
existing in this universe
glorious with multiplicities

whose possibilities include
a double rainbow
that connected dandelion clouds

over St. Helena's vines
hanging low with ripe purple fruit
while hungry ravens circled overhead.

The curving prisms revealed
where cauldrons of gold
lit up the depths of a pond

embedded as a bead of azure
into earth,
just as you now are deep

-ly embedded in my skin.
So deep you even begin
to hear a tango

danced by a silver-haired lady
sheathed in black velvet
as you feed me spicy chorizo

sausages, crisp-skinned and blood
-stuffed morcillas studded with raisins,
crusty sweetbreads and tender kidneys

in a feast that will leave you and me
ravaged but even more ravenous
for each other's flesh.

As you fall
asleep
in my skin

I shall stoke up the fire
deepening the furrow on your brow
by offering the gesture women

have made for centuries
to those they wish to please:

the pouring of your wine

into a goblet
as heavy as the armor
I released upon feeling

your hunger to fall
into my skin.
My hand on a decanter

spills "libations" (becomes "Biblical," no less!)
to prepare for your sleep
in my skin (but only after other...actions).

I recognize your longing
for my hand
's approach for your pleasure

after you memorized that same gesture
I saw immortalized
as oil on canvas across a table

set in damask, crystal, silver,
porcelain, a candle's flame
a low bowl spilling forth vermillion blooms....

Deeper still you fall
into my skin
to bring us both to Tuscany

where your fingers linger
on certain spots of my flesh
normally hidden from the world

until I gasp and rear up
from linen named "Solace"
edged in a series of thin stripes

whose colors someone adeptly
labeled celery, parchment, creme brulee,
persimmon, blue sage, black pearl....

You anticipated my love
for the vocabulary of fabrics: how red
becomes claret, green becomes khaki

or caca d'oie, oranges become brick,
cinnamon or terra cotta. As you revel in
anonymity through my skin, you repeat this list

for you know I love any litany
of words whose shapes
your lips form against my skin.

Even more, I urge you in, in,
in-to my skin
to bring you back

to my childhood
farm where I browned
a younger version

of these legs
(you now nibble for you're a tease)
by playing with freshly-plucked tobacco leaves.

This same memory surfaced
while I was still spinning
fairy tales to lure you

into falling asleep in my skin,
like a story about a cigar shoppe
on Sixth Avenue with another

list which, simply by making my lips
move, reminded me of you:
Macamundo, Push, Hoyo de Monterrey,

Cohiba Partagas, Excalibur, Davidoff,
Zino. With you in my skin, I now dance
with your tongue as I promise

I shall stand before you someday
somewhere in Gevrey-Chambertin
releasing from my waist a voluminous skirt

whose ribbons you shall admire
for shimmering like sunlit rivers.
The images from these stories,

and more (for there is always more
between us), such as steel skyscrapers
piercing fat, grey clouds, or a tapestry

called "Marly" from whose greenery bursts
small red berries like blood drops
spool through your mind

as you fall asleep
in my skin
where, yes, you dream

and dream and dream
until you recall even a painting of deer
I once confused for mules

because, once, you mentioned an island
whose white heat surrounded you

falling asleep in my skin.

Where mules waited patiently
beneath the shade of olive trees
as you sculpted a milk puddle

on the floor from the translucent shift
whose lace strap you ripped
when it dared to halt your fall

into my skin. As Athena and Venus
battled for my fidelity ("as if I ever would lapse
to a binary") behind a sunlit cerulean sky.

And I remember Greece again
When you fall into my skin
elsewhere: a hotel room

dimmed by a palette of pearls
except for the rug bearing
Joseph's "many colors"

woven by long-dead boys
when only thin cloths protected their limbs
from a scorching sun. On this rug

smoothened to velvet
through centuries of downtrodden existence
you fall into my skin

but fail once more to sleep
as you feel me write a new poem
by licking and biting it into your skin.

A poem that sears
even as you heave
and plead, then demand: "Never...ever...stop...!"

You fall into my skin
through yet another occasion
by joining me in the company

of dark-suited men flinging silk ties
behind their shoulders
before their knives slice meat

again and again.
Since you are not asleep
in my skin, you hear a red-nosed

man howl from "La Traviata"
as our group banters in a room
whose walls of ancient teak

once formed an explorer's ship.
In my skin, you see the occasional seep
of blood on my plate and feel yourself

infiltrated by the future memory of animals
roasting on fires ablaze
beneath a night sky

where flames leap towards the stars,
where the shadows beneath your eyes
in my skin turn lavender, where even

the air feels primitive as hunters' rifles lean
against fallen logs. With you in my skin,
I shall pour into your glass the elements

of earth, leather, currants, gravel, tobacco,
oak, plums and voluptuous tears.
This meal unfolds itself as sheer opulence,

like the texture you feel from my skin,
velvet heating up beneath your roving palms
until I burn up everything

that was me before you fell
into my skin. Until you are the only one
filling me. And you fill me

also with Merleau-Ponty's
"syrupe and shimmering element,"
this "radiation of the visible"

sought by painters
"beneath the words
depth, space and colour."

You fall so deeply, so deeply
into my skin you begin
to recover all the memories

I've forgotten, such as Germany.
Where I peered at rainy Vilseck
between the huge biceps

of red-cheeked farmers in overalls
downing stein after stein
of gleaming amber beer. Such as Kauai

where my helicopter plunged
almost as deeply as you are falling
into my skin. Plummeted along

a 90-degree line mirrored by the groove
of a thin waterfall that foretold

the same straight line you,

in my skin, now trace with a nerve
-wracked but determined finger
beginning its caress from the furrow

deepening on your brow
before falling on down, down,
down...your will moving my hand

to the destination where you want
yourself in my skin to land.
And as I continue to do your bidding

because you are in my skin
(though I would enact your wishes
even if you had not yet began

to fall into my skin
for Beauty's expanse
also includes a "sense of dislocation")

you uncover a secret
involving the shadow of a cross
spilling against a 19th century

Shahsavan carpeting a granite floor.
Though this is not the place to say more
about that particular story

whose material includes the nuance
of teal, the fabric of chintz and the incongruity
of cabbage roses encasing arm chairs

you will hear that tale someday
and think no less of me
for you will have been in my skin

sufficiently by then to understand
how someone motivated by
"Never Enough"

was simply struggling (like 80-year-old Henry Moore)
to manage "the constant
breathing moments of a dedicated life."

And as you continue falling
now into the final stages
before we exhaust ourselves

into a sleep that still fails
to be deep enough to still your hands
from moving across skin

to please you, that still
fails to be deep enough to still
my lashes from fluttering

over each additional inch
measured out by your journey
of you in my skin, we begin to see

together the eye-narrowing glimmer of wind
shifting along an ocean's silver surface,
the curl of a leaf dropping

on a different continent, pencil-thin
smoke rising behind ten thousand mountains.
Of course, we spot the "hole"

defined by sailors as "no wind."
You fall so deeply into my skin
we fling ourselves to topple

the barrier into a parallel universe
where you and I no longer need
to imagine each other. Where you and I

unlock our fate from the aftermath
of missing each other in a city
we once shared for decades.

You fall so deeply into my skin
you detoxify me
from my addiction to a cloudy mirror

and release me into the "necessary
blindness" of the night
required for my hands to flail

about so widely that they finally
encounter you now falling
asleep in my skin

where, yes, you dream
me dreaming we are not dreaming
as you fall deeply into my skin.

Where, yes, you want
you as you find you
in my skin.

Where you have fallen
so deeply
when you awake in my skin

I shall plead, "Stay..."
Please stay:

"Forget memory"

Please stay.
Please return as you in me
to a time before memory.

Before the "beginning"
erroneously defined in books
long since relegated to dust.

Before the beginning,
before you became you
and I became I,

you were in my skin
as I was in yours.
But the beginning arrived

with the *Word*
that separated
"You" from "I."

Now, with your homecoming
into my skin
I plead, "Please stay..."

I feel feathers falling
from angels ripping off halos
to peek through Heaven's widening rip

as I plead:
"Forget memory.
Please stay..."

And you
And you
And you

cease being careful,
obviate your history of reticence,
obviate memory

"and, and, *And!*"
declare the death
of the she-wolf Chicface

whose stomach was so delicate
she only could eat
"virtuous women," a concept

you dismiss
for you in my skin
accept Poetry's demands

to privilege risk,
compelling you now to raise
a finger to place against my lips

to silence me
(finally!)

so that my eyes can hear you

Speak --
Stay --
Speak--

Speak
The Word
Love

Selected Notes to Poems:

#1:

Reference to Baudelaire from an 18 February 1860 letter from Charles Baudelaire to Armand Fraisse

#3

Referenced "insurance man" is Wallace Stevens

#5:

Third stanza references the article "Tantric paintings: a conversation with Frank Andre Jamme" by Barry Schwabsky, *Art on Paper*, May-June 2002

#6:

Second stanza references Barry Schwabsky's poem "Seen in the Dark"

#7

First stanza's food notes are annotated from "Steak Endures In Lean Times" by R.W. Apple, Jr., *New York Times*, May 8, 2002

#8:

Third stanza references the memoir *Life and a House in Southern Tuscany* by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell

#9:

First stanza references Barry Schwabsky's poem "A Late Hymnal"

Third stanza's wine notes reference *Love By The Glass* by Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher (Villard, NY, 2002)

#10:

Second stanza references "Colombia War Brings Carnage to Village Altar" by Juan Forero, *New York Times*, May 9, 2002

Third stanza references "Petal Pushers" by Katherine Wheelock, *Time Out New York*, May 2-9, 2002

Fourth stanza references "Filling the Hole in the Sky and the Ache in Hearts" by David W. Dunlap, *New York Times*, May 9, 2002

Fifth stanza references *Life and a House in Southern Tuscany* by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell

#12:

First stanza references Arthur Sze's poem "Shooting Star" in which he wrote: "I want to live as Wang Hsi-Chih lived / writing characters in gold ink on black silk – / not to frame on a wall / but to live the splendor now"

#13:

Second stanza references Q&A with Gina Magid distributed during her 2002 exhibition

Third stanza references "Reflections on Graphite Drawing" by Valerie Demianchuk

Fourth stanza references "Grand Allusion" by James Meyer [on Anne Truitt's art] in *Artforum*, April 2002

First line of fifth stanza references Jose Garcia Villa's poem "136" which begins with the line "The, hands, on, the, piano, are, armless"

#14:

Third stanza's description of table is inspired by an advertisement for Mohawk rugs.

#16:

First stanza references from "Shimmering Substance" Conversation between Barry Schwabsky and Catsou Roberts in the catalogue for the exhibition at Arnolfini, Bristow, England (2002)

Third Stanza references Gary Snyder's poem, "What You Should Know To Be A Poet," which ends with the line that a poet should know "the edge of death"

#17:

Fourth stanza references from "Shimmering Substance" Conversation between Barry Schwabsky and Catsou Roberts in the catalogue for the exhibition at Arnolfini, Bristow, England (2002)

#18:

Third stanza's description of a sculptor references Henry Moore in a meeting Donald Hall describes in his memoir *Life Work* (Beacon Press, 1993)

Third stanza's description of cookie is of Pepperidge Farm's soft-baked "Sausalito Milk Chocolate Macadamia"

#19:

First stanza references from "I Fall to Pieces" by Hank Cochran and Harlan Howard, sung by Lee Ann Rimes

Second and third stanzas reference from *Sightings* by Susan Trott

Fifth stanza's referenced Joan of Arc anniversary is May 23, 2002

Fifth and Sixth stanza reference from "Other verses with a divine meaning" by St. John of The Cross, trans. By Roy Campbell

Sixth Stanza references from *Priority* by Iselin C. Hermann

Sixth stanza references from *The White Blackbird, a life of the painter Margaret Sargent* by her granddaughter Honor Moore